

# Paticcasamuppada: Practical Dependent Origination

by Buddhadasa Bhikkhu

*Translated excerpts from the [Chinese version](#). Translated by Johnson Sumpio.*

## Foreword

The doctrine of paticcasamuppada [dependent origination] taught by the Buddha is profound; consequently, majority of people cannot understand the law of dependent origination. Nonetheless, it is as valid today as it was when the Buddha explained the doctrine to Ven. Ananda some 2500 years ago. The doctrine of dependent origination, the core of Buddhism, is so difficult to comprehend that people commit serious errors in understanding it, and thereby distort the Buddha Dhamma. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu reveals the root of the distortions, and carefully scrutinizes and analyzes it in the book. The root of the distortions may be traced back to the primitive Buddhism period, but the earliest relevant record can be found in Buddhaghosa's essay written some 1500 years ago.

The teachings of many mainstream schools are based on Buddhaghosa's essay. By treating Buddhaghosa's misinterpretation of the Buddha Dhamma as standard, they obscured the Truth. Buddhaghosa explained the doctrine of dependent origination based on the idea of three connected lifetimes (past, present, and future). According to his idea, ignorance and action in the past gave birth to the present; the consequences of past actions are thus experienced in the present. The process causes our vexation (due to Craving and Clinging) in the present life, while transmigration [the cyclical process of death and rebirth or samsara] delivers us to births and sufferings in future lives. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu examines such an interpretation and raises these critical questions: If the Buddha taught the absence of an ego (anatta), then *what* is migrating from one life to the next? If the cause of suffering is instilled in one lifetime and its consequence emerges in another, how do we free ourselves from suffering in our practice in this life?

Proper understanding of dependent origination is essential. It allows us to know that the concept of an ego is dependent on various causal conditions. It also frees us from the erroneous belief of "an everlasting self." The self or ego is not present. The idea of an ego is continually perpetrated by Ignorance. The ignorant citta [could mean the heart or mind depending on the context] is deceived by endless manifestations sustaining the illusion of "an everlasting self." As Buddhadasa Bhikkhu points out, the Buddha taught the doctrine of dependent origination to help us see through the illusions. The idea of a process of dependent arising that encompasses three lifetimes implies that something is going from one life to the next. It is contrary to what the Buddha taught, and it undermines the Buddha's teachings.

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu has strong basis in his interpretation of the doctrine of dependent origination. He circumvents the essays, and refers directly to the original Pali suttas as source. He focuses on the practical application of the Buddha's teachings for the benefit of practitioners who intend to free themselves from suffering in this very life. The doctrine of dependent origination is actually a comprehensive analysis of the onset and cessation of suffering. In understanding the law of dependent arising we see clearly how the practice can be carried out. By focusing on the Contact in the instant, one can develop Wisdom and prevent the onset of suffering because the contributing factors for the onset and cessation of suffering exist in that instant. If Ignorance confounds the citta, suffering occurs; but if Right Mindfulness and Wisdom can subjugate the Six Roots (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind), suffering ceases. In this way the doctrine of dependent origination can be practical because the causes and consequences both exist in this life, where they are accessible. If the causes of suffering exist in the previous life, as Buddhaghosa said, then freeing oneself from suffering in this life is impossible because the cause of suffering is inaccessible.

This book is very important to serious students of Buddhism. It points out the misconceptions, and leads us to the original teaching of the Buddha found in the Pali suttas. We hoped the book will clear up muddled essential religious doctrines and help everyone to understand suffering and discover everlasting peace.

## The Doctrine of Dependent Origination is Profound

The doctrine of dependent origination, the core or essence of Buddhism, is profound. For this reason, it is bound to spawn certain issues. These issues can endanger Buddhism, and take the benefits of religious doctrines away from the Buddhists. The Ven. Ananda once told the Buddha he found the doctrine of dependent origination evident and easy to comprehend. The Buddha replied, "Ananda, do not say so. The doctrine of dependent origination is so profound that sentient beings are unable to comprehend it. They are unable to understand what I teach; likewise, they are unable to perceive the process of dependent arising."

unable to understand what I teach; likewise, they are unable to perceive the process of dependent arising. Consequently, they are perplexed just like with a ball of entangled thread, a jumble of munga grass. They cannot free themselves from sufferings, state of deprivation [apaaya-bhumi], degeneration, and transmigration.”

This part of the sutta tells us not to treat the doctrine of dependent origination lightly; that one should devote his mind and intellect to the study of the doctrine.

Ordinary people, however, are used to the concept of a continuing existence. They still perceive an ego; therefore, they find the doctrine of dependent origination profound and difficult to comprehend. To them the doctrine is an unfathomable and intricate philosophy similar to the ball of entangled thread. Therefore, they spend much effort debating just like the blind men arguing among themselves when they try to describe the different parts of an elephant.

The knowledge of dependent arising comes naturally to an arhant. An arhant treats it as an open and proven science and a plaything. Even though he might not know the Buddha’s doctrine, he has seen through everything. An arhant does not cling anymore. He does not experience Craving and Clinging due to Contact. An arhant does not have to know the different links of dependent origination [the twelve links: Ignorance, Formation, Consciousness, Name & Form, Six Sense Bases, Contact, Feeling, Craving, Clinging, Existence/Being, Birth, and Aging & Death]. He might not know how to teach the doctrine of dependent origination or explain anything relevant, but because an arhant already possesses the perfect Right Mindfulness, he does not anymore experience suffering, because there is already the cessation of dependent arising.

Even with his wisdom the Buddha spared no efforts to discover the process of dependent arising and develop a doctrine for teaching sentient beings. When the Buddha attained enlightenment, he hesitated to teach the doctrine because only a handful of people would be able to understand it. In the end, however, the Buddha bore the burden of teaching the arcane and profound Truth because of his great compassion for the sentient beings. Because only a few people could understand the doctrine, we can see how difficult a task it was for the Buddha.

### **Everyday Language and Dharma Language**

The Buddha used two kinds of language to teach his doctrines. One was everyday language, which was used to teach ordinary moral lessons to people deluded by the concept of a continuing existence. These people experienced an ego. They were possessive because of their deep-rooted mental Clinging. On the other hand, the Dhamma language was used to teach people who were mildly deluded (people with sharp mind) for them to understand the Absolute Truth [paramattha-sacca], and to stop them from embracing the concept of a continuing existence.

The doctrine of dependent origination is an Absolute Truth; therefore, the Dhamma language must be used to explain it. It is contrary to the teaching of morality (about worldly goodness, which supports the concept of an ego). The everyday language cannot be used to discuss the doctrine of dependent origination. If the Dhamma language were used, however, people could not understand it, and would turn to everyday language to figure things out. Ultimately, the problem will not only be about comprehension but also about misunderstanding the law of dependent arising. This is the basic difficulty in teaching the doctrine. It is also why the Buddha initially hesitated to teach upon his enlightenment. Sometimes, comprehension is not possible even after teaching, as in the case of Bikkhu Sati, the son of a fisherman. I shall talk about him later in the book. The doctrine has been taught to and discussed with people up to the present, but they are still unable to comprehend it. They are either unable to practice it or deviating from the right path in their cultivation.

The teaching of morality involves the presence of a person, sentient beings, the self, and the Tathagata [a Buddha]. Even teaching people to perform meritorious deeds entails the idea of enjoying blessings after their death. In the case of Absolute Truth, however, sentient beings, the person, and the Tathagata are absent. There are only successive instants of occurrences due to interdependent conditions. The occurrences are a process of dependent arising (paticcasamuppanna dhamma). When these occurrences link together or form a chain, it is called dependent origination. Here the ego is absent in every instant; therefore, no entity is born, no entity has died, and nobody is receiving karmic ramification, which is according to the concept of a continuing existence. This is not nihilism because, at the very instant, no person has died. In every instant, there is only dependent arising. This is in accord with the Eight Noble Paths or the Middle Path, which is applicable in moral teaching.

If the causal conditions of goodness exist, most ordinary people adhere to morality because of habit. They seek peace of mind through meritorious deeds. When the causal conditions change, however, they suffer because they cling and they experience impermanence. They will understand that morality is not their ultimate refuge and must seek Absolute Truth, such as the doctrine of dependent origination, to get free of suffering. When a person transcends the concept of an ego, ego possession, goodness and evil, good and bad, bitterness and pleasure, then he will no longer experience suffering. The teaching of an ego that is constantly present in the process of dependent arising not only violates the law of dependent arising but also violates the Buddha’s principle in preaching the Dhamma - that is to help people totally abandon any concept of an ego. For this reason, the doctrine of dependent origination does not involve morality, because morality, in any situation, is based on the ego. It advocates the concept of a continuing existence.

morality; morality, in many situations, is based on the ego. It obscures the concept of a continuing existence.

At present, two kinds of teaching of the doctrine of dependent origination exist. One distorts the Buddha Dhamma, and it has existed for more than a thousand years. The other is in accord with the Buddha Dhamma, and it teaches awareness of Contacts at the sense bases to prevent Feeling from advancing to Craving. In this way, the doctrine of dependent origination can be practiced to reap the results at once. The truth is if ordinary people can practice in this manner, they can have significant achievements even without referring to the law of dependent arising. A serious practitioner should be wary of the confusion from these two kinds of teaching, and ensure that his cultivation is in accord with the Buddha Dhamma. The nature of dependent origination, as taught by the Buddha, upholds neither nihilism - for instance, encouraging people to abstain from performing meritorious deeds, be irresponsible, be troublesome and reckless - nor the concept of a continuing existence; for instance, advocating people to be extremists, to be deluded with the concept of an eternally existing ego or all forms of ego and ego possessiveness. The doctrine of dependent origination is not an exaggerated theory as generally believed. On the contrary, it entails rigorous cultivation such that when there is Contact in the sense base, Right Mindfulness is applied to subjugate Feeling, thus preventing its advance to Craving, Clinging, and Existence/Birth. In actual practice, a term such as "dependent origination" is unnecessary.

The doctrine of dependent origination must not be interpreted as a theory of spirits, where the spirit of the ego is present, where the spiritual consciousness is reincarnated or stays in the body. In this age, western scholars ridicule such belief. Do not mix everyday language (or a language polluted with the concept of a continuing existence) that is used in teaching morality with the doctrine of dependent origination, because only the Dhamma language (or language from the Right View) is used to teach the doctrine. Practicing in accordance with the law of dependent arising is the true Middle Path. The suttas say that in knowing dependent origination one achieves supreme or supra-mundane Right View. Such a Right View is not prone to nihilism or the concept of a continuing existence. The doctrine of dependent origination stays in the Middle Path that is neither the substantiation of the ego (concept of a continuing existence) nor the negation of the ego (nihilism). Its law follows the principle of "this exists therefore that exists, this ceases to be therefore that ceases to be." This principle keeps Buddhism from embracing nihilism or the concept of a continuing existence. We must be careful not to let the doctrine of dependent origination evolve into one that is not in accord with the Buddha Dhamma or become a doctrine of Hinduism or Brahmanism. The truth is it is impossible to instill the doctrine of dependent origination in the mind of one who embraces the concept of a continuing existence because the two are contradictory. Hence, teaching the doctrine of dependent origination using the concept of a continuing existence is undermining the law of dependent arising.

There are two distinctions in the Buddha's teachings in the primitive Pali suttas. One part is morality, which is taught to people who embrace the concept of a continuing existence, and the other part is Absolute Truth, which abolishes the concept of a continuing existence without nihilism. During the time when essayists were popular, a very common deviation was using the concept of a continuing existence to explain Absolute Truth and the doctrine of dependent origination. Whenever opportunity arose, the essayists interpreted the doctrine of dependent origination from a viewpoint where ego existed. The person died and was reborn. The essayists also interpreted the doctrine from a purely materialistic viewpoint. For instance, hell was explained to be under the ground, a place where people go when they died. It was not explained according to the law of dependent arising where the fearsome hell exists in every instant. Furthermore, even if hell is supposedly experienced according to the law of dependent arising, people still consider it under the ground or a place for dead people.

Therefore, the primitive Pali suttas must be used as basis in studying dependent origination. Do not blindly follow the essayists or totally abide by essays and canons such as the *Visuddhimagga* [Way to Purity]. I believe the author of *Vissuddhimagga* and the one who integrated the annotations of all the Pali Buddhist canons were the same person. As a result, people's thoughts were monopolized, and they blindly followed the essays and canons all throughout. Nevertheless, we must still use the principle of the Four Criteria (mahapadesa) in the *Kalama Sutta* and *Mahaparinnibbana Sutta* to safeguard and apply our autonomy so as to protect ourselves from becoming victims of books, essays, or canons that are prone to the concept of a continuing existence.

If we use the *Kalama Sutta* and the Four Criteria, we can strictly apply the Buddha's principle to choose the right things from layers upon layers of garbage. This is not to say that all of the essays and canons are useless, but that the Buddha's principle must be strictly applied to find the right explanations. According to the Four Criteria, anything that is not in accord with the Doctrine [dhamma] and Discipline [vinaya] should be considered as erroneous hearing, memory, speech, and teaching. The doctrine of dependent origination is primarily intended to abolish the concept of a continuing existence and nihilism. Therefore, if the teaching of the doctrine involves man's transmigration in three lifetimes, then it is unacceptable in accordance with the Four Criteria.

### **Principle of Dependent Origination**

Following are some points on the principle of dependent origination:

- I. In the absence of thought and wisdom for liberation, Existence/Being and Birth are developed at the

instant the Six Roots come in contact with the Six Objects [sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and idea; gunas]. In other words, the process of dependent arising begins at the very instant Contact is established due to Ignorance.

- II. In the language of dependent origination, no “person,” “ego,” “us,” or “them” exists to experience suffering, the cessation of suffering, or transmigration.
- III. In the language of dependent origination, there is no so-called “joy;” there are only suffering and the cessation of suffering. “Joy” is not spoken in dependent origination because the concept of a continuing existence is based on “joy” (“joy” readily leads to the concept of a continuing existence, whereas “suffering” readily leads to nihilism). It is only in everyday language that the absence of suffering is referred to as “joy.” For instance, “nibbana is the utmost joy” is used for the convenience of teaching morality.
- IV. There is no transmigrating consciousness (patisandhi vinnana; that which connects this life to the next) in the language of dependent origination. Therefore, the consciousness (vinnana) in dependent arising refers to the Six Consciousness (arising from contacts between the Six Roots and Six Objects). The Buddha never explained consciousness as transmigrating consciousness because his purpose is to let us clearly see the Six Consciousness of ordinary sense organs. Transmigrating consciousness was only mentioned in essays in latter period. These essays unconsciously introduced the concept of a continuing existence into Buddhism. They have encroached Buddhism like destructive insects. The truth is we already have consciousness due to ordinary sense organs or Consciousness from Ignorance in the process of dependent arising, and no longer need a transmigrating consciousness.
- V. There is only the law of dependent arising in dependent origination; meaning all phenomena emerge only when mutually dependent conditions exist. Furthermore, the beginning and end of each phenomenon happen in an instant after which other phenomena continuously arise due to mutually dependent conditions. A phenomenon that arises due to mutually dependent conditions is called a dependent arising. There are two important principles here: (1) do not entertain the idea of an ego so as not to embrace the concept of a continuing existence; and (2) do not entertain the idea that nothing exists so as not to become nihilistic. As long as one stays in the Middle Path, he will not stray from the law of dependent arising.
- VI. From the kamma viewpoint, dependent origination is the cessation of the neither-black-nor-white kammās as well as the black and the white kammās. The meritorious kamma [punna-kamma], non-meritorious kamma, and imperturbable kamma (anenja) are all considered as suffering. One must transcend the three kinds of kamma to be totally free from suffering. In this way, the kamma will not become basis for ego clinging or the concept of a continuing existence.
- VII. That which conforms to the “principle of direct and immediate efficacy” (sanditthika)[primarily concerned with the world and present life] is in accord with Buddhist principle. The interpretation of dependent origination that encompasses three lifetimes does not follow the “principle of direct and immediate efficacy.” The eleven states of dependent origination must all conform to the “principle of direct and immediate efficacy” to be recognized as the Buddha's teaching.
- VIII. There are many ways of interpreting the doctrine of dependent origination in the suttas. For instance, (1) from Ignorance to Aging & Death in forward order (anuloma); (2) from Aging & Death to Ignorance in reverse order (patiloma); the forward and reverse orders of interpretation also talk about the cessation of dependent arising; (3) from contacts between the Roots and surroundings up to emergence of Consciousness, Contact, and Feeling but without mentioning Ignorance; (4) from Feeling up to suffering in Aging & Death; and the most peculiar of all, (5) simultaneous birth and cessation in one process of dependent arising such that Formation originates from Ignorance, Consciousness originates from Formation, Name & Form originates from Consciousness, and so forth up to the stage where Craving originates from Feeling, then the cessation of Craving is explained as the cessation of Clinging thus the cessation of suffering. This peculiar interpretation seems to claim that even when the process of dependent arising has developed up to the stage of Craving, the Right Mindfulness can still be brought forth to stop Craving and reverse the process until suffering is eliminated. Nonetheless, if we discuss the different kinds of dependent arising in the suttas, we will see more clearly that the process of dependent arising does not have to encompass three lifetimes.
- IX. Dependent arising is a phenomenon that lasts an instant; it is impermanent. Therefore, Birth and Death must be explained as phenomena within the process of dependent arising in everyday life of ordinary people. Right Mindfulness is lost during contacts of the Roots and surroundings. Thereafter, when vexation due to greed, anger, and ignorance is experienced, the ego has already been born. It is considered as one “birth.” The “birth” that originates from the mother's womb used in everyday language is not the “birth” meant in the doctrine of dependent origination. The meaning of birth in everyday language obstructs our understanding of the doctrine. We should instead direct our attention on possible “future births” [emergence of the ego] at the moment. This is certainly far better than not knowing in what state the “future birth” of everyday language will deliver us.

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- X. A philosophical theory of dependent origination for discussion is not beneficial to us; therefore, it is not essential. The doctrine of dependent origination is a kind of cultivation. It can stop the manifestation of suffering by maintaining awareness in the Six Roots when they come in contact with surroundings. Applying this principle to protect the Six Roots and stop influxes (asava) ["flowing" of the citta that perpetrates samsara] is the real end to the process of dependent arising. Any same method of cultivation is correct even if it is not referred to as the doctrine of dependent origination. This manner of ending the process of dependent arising is called the Right Path (sammapatipada).

The above points can be used as criteria for testing one's understanding of the real doctrine of dependent origination. The real doctrine of dependent origination is actual cultivation that leads directly to cessation of suffering. Suffering is manifested because vexation generates a process of dependent arising (from Ignorance to Aging & Death). The process involves two rounds of birth, because once the Roots come in contact with the Objects, Consciousness emerges out of Ignorance. The first round of birth refers to the emergence of Name & Form due to Consciousness. The Six Sense Bases comes next from Name & Form. Before these happen, however, Consciousness does not seem to exist, because it is in a state of stay at the moment. Only people who embrace the concept of a continuing existence call it the transmigrating consciousness [that connects one lifetime to the next]. Feeling, originating from Contact, generates vexation that is due to Craving and Clinging. Thereafter, Existence/Being and Birth follow in succession. This is the birth of the ego and ego possessiveness, the second round of birth. At this point, suffering due to birth, aging, death, distress, sorrow, bitterness, worrying, and irritation may be experienced. They are simply called the Five Aggregates of Clinging (pancupadanakkhandha) or suffering. Therefore, each process of dependent arising involves two rounds of birth. Death or birth, in the doctrine of dependent origination, does not come when one is physically dead. The birth and death of the physical body in everyday language has nothing to do with the Buddha's doctrine of dependent origination.

The Buddha's purpose in teaching the doctrine of dependent origination is to totally abolish the concept of an ego. It is not enough to analyze the absence of an ego using the Five Aggregates; the process of dependent arising must be perceived clearly. Each of the Aggregates appears in accordance with the law of causality "this exists therefore that exists, this ceases to be therefore that ceases to be" only when the eleven states of dependent arising have totally come about. This enables us to better perceive the absence of an ego, delusion (vexation), kamma, and karmic reaction (vipaka); or realize the absence of ego in the entire causal process. Yet, learning about the absence of ego in the Five Aggregates but not clearly perceiving dependent arising might still result in delusion. For instance, in the Pali suttas, a bhikkhu asks the Buddha, "Esteemed Buddha, if the ego is absent in the Five Aggregates, then who is the receiver of karmic repercussions due to actions of the ego that is absent?" Evidently, there is knowledge about the absence of ego in the Five Aggregates, but there is no full understanding of the concept of absence of ego. Consequently, there is the idea that an ego has to experience suffering or pleasure due to the law of kamma. That is absurd. There will be no such question if the process of dependent arising is correctly perceived.

No ego can be found operating when the phenomena that last an instant according to the law of dependent arising are correctly perceived. This life and the next, the woeful realms (hell, hungry ghost, animal, and asura realms), man, heavenly gods, Brahma, the Buddha, or sangha, however, exist in the process of dependent arising. They are perpetuated by volitional action (abhisankhara) of meritorious, non-meritorious, and imperturbable kammās. If the volitional action has already generated Feeling or Birth, and the citta is afflicted by extreme vexation and anxiety, then hell is created in the moment. This is the hell of great heat (mahaparalaha) mentioned by the Buddha in the *Samyutta-nikaya*. It is also called the "hell where the six contact points belong" (chappassa yatanika niraya). It is real hell and more horrible than the hell under the ground that is believed by people who embrace the concept of a continuing existence. The same sutta refers to the "heaven where the six contact points belong" (chappassa yatanika deva). It is real heaven and more realistic than the heaven in the sky that is believed by people who embrace the concept of a continuing existence. When we suffer and experience terror, we are in the asura realm. When we are starving and breathless, we are in the hungry ghost realm. When we are foolish, we are in the animal realm. When we experience both suffering and pleasure, we are in the human realm. When we enjoy different temperaments and interests, we are in the realms of heavenly gods. When we experience too much pleasure and non-suffering-and-non-pleasure from meditation on the form or formless (rupa-jhana or arupa-jhana), we are in the realms of Brahma. All these are more realistic than the realms in the after-life [physical death] that is believed by people who embrace the concept of a continuing existence. The misunderstandings are caused by a distorted concept of Buddhism's "spontaneous arising" or "spontaneous origination" (opapatika).

True Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha can be immediately confirmed upon the cessation of dependent arising. Only a wise person can confirm them by personal experience. They are more realistic than the Three Jewels of Buddhism spoken by people who embrace the concept of a continuing existence. The Three Jewels spoken by such people are meaningless. The "present life" is one process of dependent arising in the instant, whereas the "next life" is another process of dependent arising in the next instant.

This is a more realistic way of understanding the law of dependent arising. To people who embrace the concept of a continuing existence, however, "birth" comes from the mother's womb and "death" is physical

death. This is using everyday or children's language and not what the Buddha taught. One must comprehend the law of dependent arising according to the Buddha's doctrine of dependent origination and not according to latter-period essayists, who embraced the concept of a continuing existence. The dependent origination discussed by latter-period essayists was their own creation that has been passed down up to present day.

The language of dependent origination or the perfect Dhamma language can help us perceive the truth in phenomena. It is different from ordinary languages that are polluted by concepts of continuing existence. For instance, in the Right View (sammaditthi), there are other worlds, parents, heaven, hell, kamma, initiator and receiver of the kamma, the present life and the next. All these are explained according to the language of ordinary people. In the Intermediate Right View, there are only suffering and cessation of suffering. A suffering entity or "person" that is ending the suffering is neither mentioned nor acceptable. In the Perfect Right View, or undistorted supra-mundane realm, dependent arising is perceived as is, neither existing (atthita) nor nonexistent (natthita). Seen from the Middle Path the process of dependent arising, which operates according to the principle "this exists therefore that exists, this ceases to be therefore that ceases to be," is perceived as devoid of ego, person, heaven, or hell. A perception of this level is called Truthful Middle Path because it is prone neither to nihilism nor the concept of a continuing existence.

In the Right View that abides by secular truth the ego is present, whereas in the Right View that perceives the Absolute Truth ego is in-existent. The Buddha always used two kinds of language to expound his doctrines. The doctrine of dependent origination is about Absolute Truth and not ethics and morality. No entity is migrating from one life to the next. Also, it is not necessary for a process of dependent arising to encompass three lifetimes.

The method of explaining a process of dependent arising as encompassing three lifetimes can be traced back partly to Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga* [The Path of Purification]. The rest is unclear because no other relevant materials are older than the *Visuddhimagga*. Therefore, I will comment on the essay and its author. Essentially, my target is not Buddhaghosa. I believe it is beneficial for us to use the proper method in studying the Buddha Dharma, practicing Buddhism, or applying the Buddha's doctrine of dependent origination. I disagree with explanations that are not in accord with the Buddha's teaching. Hence, my comments are not actually for personal gains. I simply use relevant theories in the Pali suttas to help everyone understand the doctrine on his own, find out the truth, and not necessarily believe me or any other person. We would violate the spirit of the *Kalama Sutta* if we blindly believe what people are saying. We must use the "dhamma eye" as tool for assessing issues.

Buddhaghosa simply added analogies, notes, and commentaries in the then existing *Vimuttimagga* to produce his *Visuddhimagga*. It aggravated the situation. We must therefore focus our attention to the Buddha's doctrine of dependent origination. Although it is very difficult, still we must do our best to let the Buddha's doctrine benefit sentient beings.

Because Buddhaghosa's essay does not corroborate with the tenets of the Pali suttas, such as the *Kalama Sutta*, I, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, like a puny insect that is trying to topple a tree or stop a moving vehicle, must depend on my intelligence to comment on Buddhaghosa. Although people will find my effort outrageous, as a Buddhist, I am quite satisfied with what I am doing because I am introducing the right theory to the teaching of the doctrine of dependent origination, the core of Buddhism.

### **The Doctrine of Dependent Origination is the Perfect Truth**

Most people relate to the Four Noble Truths when the core of Buddhism is mentioned. The doctrine of dependent origination is the perfect and ultimate Truth; hence, it is called "maha-ariyasacca" [the Great Truth]. It must be discussed until it is fully understood. Dependent arising exists within us in almost every moment; yet, we are not aware of it.

Anybody who is able to comprehend the doctrine of dependent origination has the capability to engage in his own cultivation and end his suffering. On the other hand, we must consider it our responsibility to understand it, and help others to understand it. Such is the Buddha's wish. If we can do it, then the Buddha's realization of dependent arising will not be in vain.

It is just like the Four Noble Truths. If nobody understands them, then the Buddha Dharma is useless. Essentially, the doctrine of dependent origination is more important than the Four Noble Truths. It is the perfect and ultimate Truth. We must help one another to comprehend it, and promote it to all Buddhists. This is the main reason why we are discussing the "maha-ariyasacca," the doctrine of dependent origination.

Following are guide questions to help you understand the doctrine. What is dependent arising? Why do we have to know about dependent arising? What are the benefits of understanding dependent arising? What method do we use to end suffering?

### **What is Dependent Arising?**

The doctrine of dependent origination explicitly points out how suffering begins and ends. It reveals that the beginning and ending of suffering are mutually dependent cyclic natural phenomena; that they are not attributable to ghosts, divinities, spiritual entities, or other things. Dependent arising is natural occurrences due to interdependent conditions. When each phase of the process comes about due to mutually supporting conditions suffering begins or stops. The “paticca” in paticcasamuppada means “mutually dependent,” while “samuppada” means “to occur simultaneously.” Dependent arising, therefore, occurs due to mutually dependent and cyclic causal conditions.

The doctrine of dependent origination also explains that no “person,” “self,” or “sentient beings” exist, or no “person,” “self,” or “sentient beings” are successively transmigrating. Everything manifests, stays, and expires naturally. By comprehending the doctrine, one can see that the no “person,” “self,” or “sentient beings” with an ego exist. If people do not comprehend the doctrine, they will be dominated by ignorance, and will feel that a “person,” “self,” or “sentient beings” exist. The doctrine of dependent origination points out that how suffering begins and ends and the beginning and end of suffering are due to mutually dependent causal conditions. In this sense, the “person,” “self,” and “sentient beings” are superfluous.

Furthermore, the mutually dependent cyclic phenomena start and end with great intensity and in a flash. Thoughts arise with great intensity and in a flash. Anger comes about with great intensity and in a flash. In everyday life, when a mind action occurs in a flash and generates suffering, it becomes a dependent arising instantaneously. One feels horrified if he can perceive such phenomena. If one cannot, then he will be oblivious to them. Dependent arising, to put it in ordinary language, is intense and lightning-speed mind action, which generates suffering, in our everyday life.

### **Why Do We Have to Know About Dependent Arising?**

For the purpose of learning and cultivation, we must know dependent arising. Because nobody understands it, it has become a fallacy. The ordinary people’s fallacy is similar to Bhikkhu Sati’s belief: “Only the consciousness is going around in samsara.” This bhikkhu insisted that there was a “person,” “self,” or “sentient being” in the consciousness, which dwelled in samsara from one lifetime to the next. Believing that the consciousness has a “person,” “self” or “sentient being” that is perpetually going around in samsara is a fallacy resulting from ignorance of the nature of dependent arising.

All the bhikkhus tried to convince Bhikkhu Sati to abandon the fallacy, but Bhikkhu Sati was adamant about his view. The bhikkhus then told the Buddha about it, and the Buddha talked to Bhikkhu Sati. The Buddha asked him, “Do you really have such a concept?” Bhikkhu Sati said, “There is only the consciousness that is going around in samsara.” The Buddha then asked, “What is this consciousness that you speak of?” Bhikkhu Sati replied, “Esteemed Buddha, the consciousness is the entity that can talk, feel, or receive all the karmic repercussions.”

His was a very serious fallacy: a consciousness that facilitates talking, feeling, and receiving of all karmic repercussions.

Ordinary people do not know why it is a fallacy because they believe, as Bhikkhu Sati did, that the consciousness exists perpetually. Since they are used to the idea, they do not consider it a fallacy.

It is false to believe that the consciousness is perpetual, that it exists and acts on its own, and that it is not dependent arising. Consciousness, a manner of dependent arising, is devoid of ego. It manifests in an instant because of the interaction of mutually dependent conditions, and it advances to successive stages.

Bhikkhu Sati maintained that there was an ego or a consciousness with an ego that went around in samsara. This consciousness did not only exist in the instant but also persisted to the next life. He called the ego that could talk, feel, or receive karmic repercussions consciousness.

The common view prevents people from seeing the fallacy. Consciousness is devoid of ego. If consciousness exists, then it is dependent arising. It is a natural phenomenon manifested from successive occurrences due to mutually dependent conditions. It is not an entity.

### **What are the Benefits of Understanding Dependent Arising?**

Understanding dependent arising enables us to reject fallacy and possess the Right View to be totally free from suffering. It is false to believe that a “person” is present and reincarnates into a certain sentient being due to kamma. If one erroneously believes consciousness is ego, then he will experience suffering, and will be unable to free himself from suffering. Therefore, one must know the nature of consciousness, which is dependent arising. In this way, one can totally eliminate suffering using the Right View, the right understanding. According to the Pali suttas, “Consciousness is dependent arising. It is a phenomenon arising due to mutually dependent conditions. Without these causal conditions, there is no consciousness.”

If consciousness has a main body, then it can manifest on its own initiative, and does not have to depend on causal conditions. The truth is consciousness cannot exist independently. Nevertheless, it is so infinitesimal that we find ourselves thinking, feeling, and allowing the Name & Form (body and mind) to

immaterial that we find ourselves thinking, feeling, and knowing the name & form (body and mind) to perform work. Hence, we mistakenly think that there is a main body in us, and we call it consciousness. The doctrine of dependent arising helps us abandon such a fallacy for the cessation of suffering.

### **What Method Do We Use to End Suffering?**

As the ordinary principles always advocate, it is right cultivation, the proper way of living or right living. Proper way of living is using wisdom to defeat ignorance, using knowledge to stop foolish living, or maintaining mindfulness, especially with external contacts. Right living is having perfect Right Mindfulness in life. Thus, there is Wisdom or Right View not foolishness and ignorance in one's life. Right living is a life without suffering.

### **The Eleven States of Dependent Arising**

The doctrine of dependent origination taught presently is not in accord with the primitive Pali suttas. What is said in the primitive Pali suttas is different from what is being passed on today. In the Pali suttas, the dependent arising is a chain of eleven states, which make up one cycle, whereas the eleven states being explained today encompass three lifetimes: the past, present, and future lifetimes. Such a dependent arising cannot be used in our cultivation.

The primitive Pali suttas state that whenever we experience vexation, the eleven states are mutually dependent and they advance successively to generate a dependent arising. For this reason, dependent arising does not have to encompass three lifetimes, a lifetime, a year, a month, or a day. A complete process of dependent arising and the suffering that ensues can possibly occur and end in an instant. If dependent arising is erroneously taught, it becomes useless and sets off senseless arguments. If it is explained in accordance to the primitive Pali suttas, however, dependent arising can provide significant benefits because it directly resolves our everyday problems.

One must first know the eleven states of dependent arising to better understand the subject:

1. Ignorance bears Volitional Action: Volitional Action emerges because Ignorance is its supporting condition.
2. Volitional Action bears Consciousness: Consciousness emerges because Volitional Action is its supporting condition.
3. Consciousness bears Name-and-Form: Name-and-Form emerges because Consciousness is its supporting condition.
4. Name-and-Form bears the Six Sense Bases: Six Sense Bases emerges because Name-and-Form is its supporting condition.
5. Six Sense Bases bears Contact: Contact emerges because the Six Sense Bases is its supporting condition.
6. Contact bears Feeling: Feeling emerges because Contact is its supporting condition.
7. Feeling bears Craving: Craving emerges because Feeling is its supporting condition.
8. Craving bears Clinging: Clinging emerges because Craving is its supporting condition.
9. Clinging bears Becoming: Becoming emerges because Clinging is its supporting condition.
10. Becoming bears Birth: Birth emerges because Becoming is its supporting condition.
11. Birth bears Aging & Death: Aging, sickness, death, anxiety, sorrow, vexation, and suffering emerge because Birth is their supporting condition.

The eleven states are mutually dependent in a complete process of dependent arising. As stated in the Pali suttas, there is no gap between any of the states. Therefore, it is not necessary to classify the first two states as belonging to the past, the next ten states to the present, the remaining state to the future, and thereby explain a process of dependent arising as encompassing three lifetimes. If it is explained as encompassing three lifetimes, how can one take advantage of dependent arising and cultivate to end suffering, when the "cause" is in the present life and the "fruit" is in another? The doctrine of dependent origination being taught today encompasses three lifetimes, thus it is not helpful to our cultivation.

If you study the Pali suttas, you will discover that dependent arising is not like this. It does not need three lifetimes to complete a process. Depending on the circumstance, only one, two, or three instants are sufficient to complete a process.

## Suffering Due to Dependent Arising Depends on Clinging

The suffering in dependent arising requires Clinging as supporting condition. For instance, if a farmer who is working under the sun does not cling to "Oh, I feel very hot!" The "very hot" sensation will only be a natural sensation, and not a suffering due to dependent arising. Natural sensation results from external stimulation, but because the mind does not cling to it, there is no personal feeling of suffering. Suffering in dependent arising, however, is vexation experienced due to the mind's clinging to sensation of external stimulation. Suffering due to dependent arising requires Clinging, and it leads to the emergence of ego. If the farmer becomes agitated by thinking "Because I am a farmer, it is my kamma to do this hard labor," he will feel dejected. In thinking this way, suffering due to dependent arising emerges.

If the heat generated by the sun on the farmer's body is treated as natural sensation, and there is no Clinging, then the ego will not emerge. Therefore, there is no suffering in a dependent arising. When there is Clinging, suffering develops totally. It is suffering in a dependent arising. If our hand is bleeding from a cut and we feel the pain without Clinging, it is natural sensation and not suffering in a dependent arising.

Suffering in a dependent arising must come from a complete process of Ignorance, Volitional Action, Consciousness, Name-and-Form, Six Sense Bases, Contact, Feeling, Craving, Clinging, Becoming, Birth, and Aging & Death.

Buddhists understand that when the Six Roots come in contact with the Six Objects, and these Objects have value or significance, then the Six Objects support the emergence of Ignorance. For instance, suffering is not experienced if one sees a tree and stone as insignificant, whereas it will be a different matter if one sees a tiger, woman, or something of significance. If a male dog sees a beautiful woman, the latter will be insignificant to the former. If a young man sees the beautiful woman, however, she will be very significant to him. Here the "seeing" of the male dog is not relevant to dependent arising, but the young man's "seeing" is.

Tree, weeds, and stones are insignificant in ordinary situation, but a diamond, stone statue of a divinity, or tree with special meaning can cause a dependent arising in the citta. Therefore, we may conclude that when the Six Roots come in contact with the Six Objects, the Six Objects must be significant to the viewer for them to bring about ignorance, foolishness, and confusion. Only in such contacts will Consciousness arise in the instant and advance towards Volitional Action. Volitional Action can generate Name-and-Form making the viewer's normal body and mind abnormal and wild. Consequently, the body and mind experience suffering.

When the Name-and-Form is transformed, the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind become the Six "abnormal and wild" Roots. The process then goes on to the "wild" Contact, Feeling, Craving, Clinging, Becoming, and finally Birth. Birth is the total emergence of ego. Furthermore, because of Clinging, Birth, Aging & Death, or different kinds of suffering can emerge at once.

The above is an example of dependent arising that occurs in everyday life. It is a complete process of the eleven states of dependent arising in an instant. There can be tens or hundreds of dependent arising occurring in a day without our being aware of them. For this reason, saying that the process of dependent arising encompasses three lifetimes is false.

People generally misunderstand the doctrine of dependent origination. Believing that the process of dependent arising encompasses three lifetimes is straying from the original meaning of the primitive Pali suttas. Dependent arising begins and stops with lightning speed. It generates suffering, and occurs in our everyday life.

## The Buddha Discovered Dependent Arising

How did the doctrine of dependent origination originate? In the *Samyutta-nikaya*, the Buddha spoke of discovering dependent arising after six years of ascetic practice. Following are what the Buddha said in the Pali suttas:

*Bhikkhus, before I became enlightened and was still a bodhisattva, I had already realized that all sentient beings experienced suffering in birth, old age, death, and rebirth. If the sentient beings do not know the method for the cessation of suffering, how are they supposed to be free of suffering?*

*Bhikkhus, I asked, "Why is there old age and death? What are the causal conditions for old age and death?" Because I skillfully endeavored on mind training, I developed Wisdom sight.*

*Birth is condition to Aging & Death. Aging & Death comes from Birth.*

*Becoming is condition to Birth. Birth comes from Becoming.*

*Clinging is condition to Becoming. Becoming comes from Clinging.*

*Craving is condition to Clinging. Clinging comes from Craving.*

*Feeling is condition to Craving. Craving comes from Feeling.*

*Contact is condition to Feeling. Feeling comes from Contact.  
Six Sense Bases is condition to Contact. Contact comes from Six Sense Bases.  
Name-and-Form is condition to Six Sense Bases. Six Sense Bases comes from Name-and-Form.  
Consciousness is condition to Name-and-Form. Name-and-Form comes from Consciousness.  
Volitional Action is condition to Consciousness. Consciousness comes from Volitional Action.  
Ignorance is condition to Volitional Action. Volitional Action comes from Ignorance.*

*Thereafter, I meditated on it again in another way:*

*Ignorance is condition to Volitional Action.  
Volitional Action is condition to Consciousness.  
Consciousness is condition to Name-and-Form.  
Name-and-Form is condition to Six Sense Bases.  
Six Sense Bases is condition to Contact.  
Contact is condition to Feeling.  
Feeling is condition to Craving.  
Craving is condition to Clinging.  
Clinging is condition to Becoming.  
Becoming is condition to Birth.  
Birth is condition to Aging & Death.*

*Bhikkhus, the people have never heard of wisdom that conquers suffering. The Wisdom sight, Dhamma eye, and brilliance have all come about within me.*

This is the dependent arising or chain of suffering the Buddha discovered when he became enlightened. The Buddha also discovered that suffering is generated by the eleven states of dependent arising. When one who is dominated by Ignorance (absence of Right Mindfulness) comes in contact with the surrounding, Consciousness emerges in that instant. Consciousness is not a perpetual entity. It is manifested only when the Roots come in contact with the surroundings. Thereafter, Volitional Action, the motive force for creating new Name-and-Form, emerges rapidly following the manifestation of Consciousness. The new Name-and-Form will then experience suffering, and generate the Six Sense Bases that sustains suffering. Subsequently, Contact, Feeling, Craving, Clinging, Becoming, and Birth (emergence of the ego) emerge one after the other. At this point, the conditions for suffering are complete.

From what we know about Buddhism and man's history, the Buddha was the first to discover dependent arising. After he discovered it, he became enlightened. This was how the doctrine of dependent origination originated according to the Pali suttas.

### **Becoming and Birth in the Language of Dependent Origination**

The language of dependent origination is expounded by the Dhamma language, which is used by people who have seen the dhamma, and not by the everyday language, which is used by people who are ignorant of the Buddha Dhamma.

If we use everyday language to explain dependent origination, there will be confusion and lack of understanding. For instance, the Buddha's enlightenment under the Bodhi tree was the cessation of Ignorance. With the cessation of Ignorance came the cessation of Volitional Action, Consciousness, and Name-and-Form. Why then did the Buddha not die? When the Buddha attained enlightenment, it was the cessation of Ignorance. With the cessation of Ignorance came the cessation of Volitional Action. Why then did the Buddha not die under the Bodhi tree? It is because the language of dependent origination is the Dhamma language. Therefore, Birth and Death do not mean the birth or death of the physical body.

If the terms are misunderstood, as when everyday language is used, then a process of dependent arising entails two forms of birth. One is the birth of Name-and-Form (from sexual union of the parents); another is birth in the next life. If there are two births, then dependent arising will be thought to encompass three lifetimes: past, present, and future lifetimes. At this point, a complete process of dependent arising will be disjointed, and it will not be in accord with the Buddha's doctrine of dependent origination. The amusing part is, even if there are two forms of birth in dependent arising, there are no two forms of death. This is because two forms of death are incomprehensible.

According to the doctrine, the Becoming and Birth in dependent arising do not originate from the mother's womb but from Clinging, where the experience of an ego develops; it is called Birth. This can be proven by the Pali suttas.

In the suttas, the Buddha said, "Clinging to that which brings delight." This means when Contact brings on Feeling, no matter if that Feeling is construed as suffering, pleasure, or non-suffering-and-non-pleasure, there is "delight" in it. This is Clinging. Any form of "delight" is Clinging because "delight" sustains Clinging. When there is "delight," there is Clinging.

"Delight" here refers to satisfaction in perplexity. According to the Buddha, "delight" is Clinging. When we are satisfied with a certain thing, we are holding on to it. There is "delight" in Feeling, thus "delight" is Clinging. Therefore, when we experience Feeling, "delight" emerges at once; it is Clinging. "From Clinging comes Becoming; from Becoming comes Birth; from Birth comes Aging & Death. This is suffering."

comes becoming, from becoming comes birth, from birth comes aging & death. This is suffering.

Becoming and Birth come from Feeling, Craving, and Clinging. They do not have to wait for transmigration after physical death to emerge. Becoming and Birth can happen at any time and place. They can happen many times in a day. When Feeling in reaction to Ignorance exists, a certain kind of "delight" due to perplexity develops. This is Clinging; after which Existence/Birth and Birth develop. Therefore, Becoming and Birth emerge in an instant, and they happen many times in a day.

In Dhamma language, the development of the ego and ego possessiveness, which is occurrence of Becoming and Birth, can happen many times in a day, hundreds of times in a month, thousands of times in a year.

Dependent arising is a phenomenon that happens in an instant. It does not encompass three lifetimes. The process of dependent arising occurs in everyday life. Ignorance is the beginning of a process of dependent arising. When Ignorance is eliminated, the process cannot continue; then there is absence of suffering.

### **The Ego is Not Present in Dependent Arising**

The erroneous interpretation of the doctrine of dependent origination is not only unfavorable to the practitioner but also harmful to Buddhism. The belief that dependent arising encompasses three lifetimes, which is not based on the principle of the Pali suttas, is false. It is false based whether on the words or on the meaning of the Pali suttas.

According to the Pali suttas, the Buddha said that dependent arising is successive instants of occurrences due to interdependent conditions. The process starts with Ignorance and ends in suffering. There are no other things involved in the process.

Based on the Buddha's teaching, therefore, it is apparent that the belief of a dependent arising that encompasses three lifetimes is false. The Buddha's purpose in teaching the doctrine of dependent origination was to eliminate fallacies, to stop the clinging to self, person, or sentient beings. Hence, the ego is not present in his explanation of the chain of eleven states of dependent arising.

Now, some people explain dependent arising as having an entity that transmigrates three lifetimes. One's vexation in his past life is said to be the cause of karmic repercussions in his present life. The karmic repercussions in his present life again become a new vexation that will cause karmic repercussions in his next life. Seen this way dependent arising involves an ego, spirit, sentient being, or person that is in transmigration. This was what the Bhikkhu Sati falsely believed. It is against the Buddha's teachings, where the ego is not present.

The Four Criteria also tell us that the viewpoint of a dependent arising with ego is false because it is contrary to what the Buddha taught. The Pali suttas explain dependent arising as successive instants of occurrences due to interdependent conditions. The ego is not present if the suttas' original meaning is preserved.

### **Everyday Language Cannot Be Used to Interpret the Doctrine of Dependent Origination**

#### **Name-and-Form in Everyday Language and the Dhamma Language**

As explained before, the doctrine of dependent origination is not to be interpreted in everyday language. If the doctrine is interpreted in everyday language, then the following would have happened: After the Buddha had become enlightened, he died under the Bodhi tree immediately. This is because when Ignorance ceases so do Volitional Action, Consciousness, and Name-and-Form. Thus, the Buddha should have died when his Ignorance ceased. The Buddha did not die, however, but continued to teach his dhamma for the next 45 years. This means the doctrine of dependent origination cannot be interpreted using everyday language. The same goes for the process of dependent arising. The emergence of Name-and-Form cannot be interpreted by everyday language because the Buddha taught that Feeling sustains delight, which in turn gives rise to Craving, Clinging, Becoming, and Birth. The Birth here does not refer to birth of the physical body; likewise, the death does not refer to expiration of the physical body. They refer to Birth and Death in the mind: the Birth and Death of the ego.

Therefore, the Name-and-Form in the doctrine should be interpreted using the Dhamma language. In everyday language, the Name-and-Form is the mind and physical body that continue to exist after one is born. The elaborate abhidhamma says Name-and-Form has countless births in every instant, but in the Dhamma language of the Buddha, each birth originates from contact between Ignorance and the surrounding. The birth will only stop when the contact ceases. According to everyday language, each process of dependent arising has two forms of birth. Because it is incomprehensible, it is explained as involving three lifetimes. Such an interpretation, however, embraces the concept of a continuing existence.

#### **"State of Seeking Birth" in Everyday Language and the Dhamma Language**

The difference of the Dhamma language and everyday language can also be found in interpreting the "state of seeking birth" (sambhavesi). In performing the Buddhist rite for dedication, we recite a portion of the

sutta for dedication: “to grant all sentient beings - those that have been born or in the state of seeking birth - happiness.” This refers to two kinds of sentient beings: one that has already been born (bhuta), and one that is seeking birth. This is the interpretation of ordinary people in Thailand and other countries. The sentient beings that have been born are living now, like you and me. As for those who are still in the “state of seeking birth,” there is a consciousness that is without a physical shell moving around seeking birth. This is an interpretation entirely in everyday language, and not according to the Buddha Dhamma.

Buddhism does not advocate a consciousness or entity that moves around seeking birth [or rebirth, as is usually believed]; it is a belief held by people who embrace the concept of a continuing existence. In Buddhism, consciousness emerges and expires in an instant according to the law of dependent arising. This is my opinion, Buddhism’s “state of seeking birth” is interpreted in the Dhamma language; it is different from that of everyday language. Buddhism’s “state of seeking birth” refers to a state that, in the case of ordinary people, is still without vexation; a state where there is still the absence of Craving, Clinging, or holding on to self.

It is normal for Craving, Clinging, and the holding on to ego and ego possessiveness to exist in everyday life, but they are inactive most of the times. For instance, those of you sitting there listening are without the ego because you do not crave or cling to anything. You do not have the illusion of an ego. You are just sitting there, listening naturally, and you are in a normal and blank state. When strong Craving and Clinging emerge, however, intense suffering follows. Ordinary people thus live in two states: where one is “born” because there is Craving, Clinging, and a suffering self, and where one is in a “state of seeking birth.” They are the objects of the Buddhist rite for dedication: those that are “born” and foolish and those that are in a “state of seeking birth” and oblivious of what is happening.

The “state of seeking birth” awaits the birth of the ego and ego possessiveness. It is a sorry state because the ego and ego possessiveness are ready to emerge at any time. When one loses Right Mindfulness, and the ego and ego possessiveness develop out of contact between Ignorance and the surrounding, there is “birth.” This “birth” of the ego and ego possessiveness, caused by greed or anger, is, however, short lived. Once greed or anger disappears, the “born” [birth of the ego] expires and returns to a “state of seeking birth.” Then again, from the “state of seeking birth” comes the “birth” of the ego and ego possessiveness because of craving, anger, hatred, or fear. The process of dependent arising is thus repeated. In each process of dependent arising, “birth” is realized because of causal conditions. When these causal conditions disappear, the “born” expires and returns to a “state of seeking birth.”

This interpretation of the “state of seeking birth” is useful in cultivation because the practitioner can take advantage of and benefit from it; unlike with ordinary people’s interpretation, where the consciousness leaves the body and moves around seeking birth after death. I do not believe the “state of seeking birth” should be interpreted according to everyday language. It is irrelevant to the doctrine of dependent origination, and not beneficial to us. Worse, it embraces the concept of a continuing existence.

My unorthodox belief can be proven using the Pali suttas. They are found in the record of the material food (kabalinkarahara), contact food (phassahara), thought food (manosancetanahara), and consciousness food (vinnanahara) in the *Samyutta-nikaya*. The Buddha said the Four Foods [cattaro ahara] enable the “born” to live, and they nourish the “state of seeking birth.”

In explaining the Four Foods, the Buddha also used analogy of the Four Foods in everyday events. We are sentient beings that are “born” and in a “state of seeking birth” at any day. The function of the Four Foods is to continue nourishing the “state of seeking birth,” but their special effect is continually sustaining those that are already “born” (sentient beings that are born).

This example allows everyone to understand that there are two interpretations of the “born” according to everyday language and the Dhamma language. The important thing is for everyone to know which interpretation directly benefits the cultivation of the Buddha Dharma. Only the interpretation according to the Dhamma language can benefit one’s cultivation.

We must stop all “births” and “states of seeking birth” by properly cultivating according to the doctrine of dependent origination, and by disallowing the emergence of the ego and “state of seeking birth.” To stop “birth” or the “state of seeking birth,” the Four Foods must be totally eliminated. The Four Foods must not be allowed to become significant and initiate volitional action. With this kind of understanding, our cultivation can benefit from the doctrine of dependent origination.

### **Suffering in the Dhamma Language**

Suffering has many meanings. In the Dhamma language, it refers to dependent arising. In Pali, there can be suffering, the cause and end of suffering, and the pathway to the cessation of suffering, which is the development and cessation of dependent arising. Suffering has a special meaning in dependent arising.

Suffering is due to Ignorance, which bears Volitional Action. Volitional Action bears Consciousness, and the process continues until suffering comes about. This is the development of suffering according to the doctrine of dependent origination.

In the *Samyutta-nikaya*, dependent arising is referred to as the warned path. What is warned path? It is the

in the *Samyutta-nikaya*, dependent arising is referred to as the warped path. What is warped path? It is the process of dependent arising that leads to suffering. What is the True Path? It is the cessation of dependent arising, where the different states gradually die out until suffering is totally eliminated. The True Path is the right path, whereas the warped path is the wrong path.

The meaning of suffering here is different because it refers specifically to suffering after Clinging emerges. Therefore, meritorious kamma is suffering; non-meritorious kamma is suffering; imperturbable kamma is also suffering.

Volitional Action in dependent arising is a causal condition for suffering. Meritorious acts [Volitional Action] can also lead to suffering, but ordinary people do not know this. They believe meritorious acts bear pleasure. The truth is meritorious acts bear meritorious kamma, non-meritorious acts bear non-meritorious kamma, and imperturbable acts bear imperturbable kamma. There is still suffering in these three kinds of act [Volitional Action] because they sustain Clinging. One holds on to meritorious kamma, non-meritorious kamma, and imperturbable kamma because of Clinging. Thus, suffering has special meaning in dependent arising.

It is easy to comprehend that non-meritorious kamma is wrong and suffering, but both meritorious and imperturbable kammās are also suffering and wrong because they bear Clinging. Imperturbable kamma is not affected by meritorious or non-meritorious kamma, but the self is present in it. "Imperturbable" persons are often times called Brahman. Although they are not tainted with meritorious or non-meritorious kamma, the self is still present in them. Their mind may be "imperturbable" while in meditation, but Clinging emerges because the self holds on to the ego's imperturbable acts. Therefore, it still is suffering.

Ordinary people believe goodness is preferable. In the language of dependent arising, however, all is suffering. Meritorious kamma is suffering; beauty is suffering; happiness is suffering. As long as something is the result of volitional action, and it can cause successive volitional actions, then it is suffering. As long as the law of dependent arising applies, then it is suffering.

### **Dependent Arising and the Baby**

Dependent arising emerges from Clinging, and not from only thought and feeling. Therefore, it is not applicable to the fetus inside the womb. This is because Ignorance, Craving, and Clinging have not yet developed in the fetus. The *Majjhima-nikaya* tells about the birth of the baby up to the point where dependent arising occurs. In the sutta, the Buddha explicitly describes how human life is formed.

The Buddha said that when a child sees form through eye consciousness, he experiences craving for the delightful and shows disgust for the disagreeable. Because the child is without Right Mindfulness, Ignorance is present. He is dominated by habit and characteristic, and does not know deliverance through Wisdom. Hence, when he experiences the Five Sensual Desires (sight, sound, odor, taste, and touch), his mind is readily affected by contacts with the surrounding. If Right Mindfulness and Wisdom are present, however, there can be cessation of the notion of goodness and evilness.

### **Dependent Arising Occurs and Ends in a Flash**

We are unaware that a process of dependent arising begins and ends in a flash. Within this very short period of time, the eleven states or twelve links of dependent arising are manifested successively. For instance, when we become angry, suffering emerges. In an instant, we already experience suffering because of anger. We are unaware that all the eleven states, from Ignorance through Birth, occur and end successively in that instant. When our eyes see the surrounding, we experience craving or anger immediately. The process happens in an instant, and it is dependent arising.

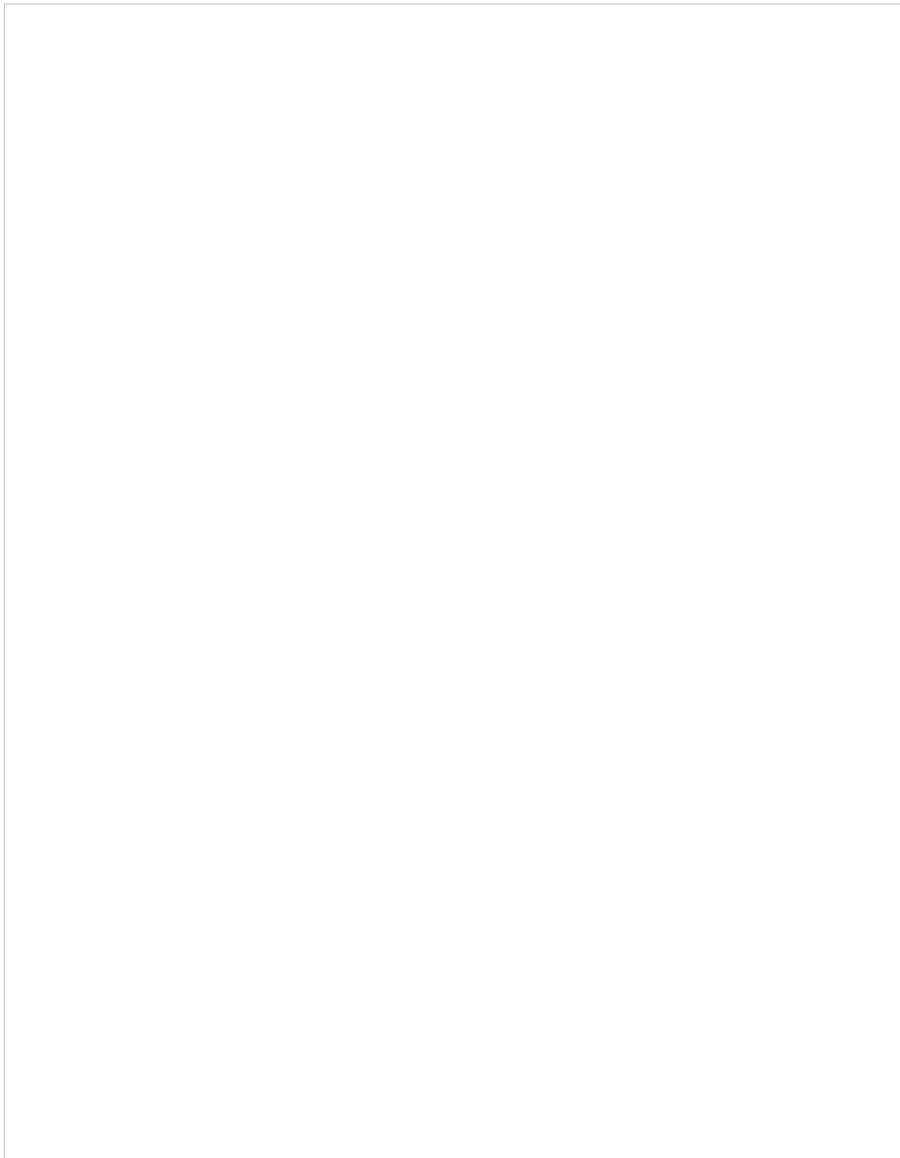
The Buddha taught about the mundane world, its cause and cessation, and method for the cessation of the mundane world in the *Samyutta-nikaya*.

*Bhikkhus, how is the mundane world formed? When the eye sees things, eye consciousness is produced. The integration of the three is Contact. Contact is causal condition of Feeling. Feeling is causal condition of Craving. Craving is causal condition of Clinging. Clinging is causal condition of Becoming. Becoming is causal condition of Birth. Birth is causal condition of aging, sickness, and death. Bhikkhus, this is how the mundane world is formed.*

A process of dependence arising is the "volitional action of the mundane world" the Buddha spoke of. The emergence of suffering is the volitional action of the mundane world. All these occur when Consciousness emerges through contacts between the Six Sense Bases (Roots) and surrounding (Objects).

It is difficult to detect how Volitional Action, Consciousness, Name-and-Form and Six Sense Bases manifest through the volitional action of Ignorance in two or more successive occurrences of a process of independent arising because they happen in a flash. What we can experience first is Feeling, the feeling of suffering, delight, joy, or melancholy. The cessation of the mundane world is similar to the cessation of suffering. With the end of Ignorance comes the end of Volitional Action; with the end of Volitional Action comes the end of Consciousness, and so on. This was how the Buddha explained it.

## A Dependent Arising Within Dependent Arising



The basic principle of dependent arising is quite unique; it is called the “radiant wheel.” Here the process of dependent arising goes into a process of termination of itself [what others call the Transcendental Order of Dependent Origination]. The amusing thing is it shows the “meritorious effect of suffering.”

The Buddha talked about the stages of ending suffering. “I will explain the cessation of influxes (asava) only to wise people or people who see truth.” The Buddha said that when one clearly sees the beginning and end of the Five Aggregates (form, feeling, thinking, volition, consciousness), the influxes within him end because of Wisdom. The Buddha was able to pronounce this Truth because he had seen and realized it.

When influxes end, the Wisdom sight appears and reflects the citta that is now free of influxes. The Wisdom that initiates cessation appears when one abandons greed [becoming dispassionate]. Dispassion comes from disenchantment. Disenchantment is experienced because of ultimate Wisdom or having the Wisdom sight to see Truth. The Wisdom sight to see Truth arises from samadhi. Samadhi arises from bliss. Bliss arises from calmness. Calmness arises from rapture. Rapture arises from contentment. Contentment arises from having faith. Faith is an upshot of suffering.

In the process of dependent arising, suffering comes from Birth. Birth comes from Becoming. Becoming comes from Clinging. Clinging comes from Craving. Craving comes from Feeling. Feeling comes from Contact. Contact comes from Six Sense bases. Six Sense Bases comes from Name-and-Form. Name-and-Form comes from Consciousness. Consciousness comes from Ignorance.

As shown above, the cessation of influxes must proceed in the order of a process of dependent arising, which arrives at faith. If we believe in the Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha, and the cessation of suffering through cultivation, then it is called faith.

Faith is condition to contentment.  
Contentment is condition to rapture.  
Rapture is condition to calmness.

Calmness is condition to bliss.  
Bliss is condition to samadhi.  
Samadhi is condition to Wisdom sight to see Truth.  
Wisdom sight to see Truth is condition to disenchantment.  
Disenchantment is condition to dispassion.  
Dispassion is condition to deliverance.  
Deliverance is condition to the Wisdom that initiates cessation towards nibbana.

This shows that the cessation of influxes must start with faith, and faith comes from suffering. This seems paradoxical but without suffering, we would not be forced to seek the protection of the Buddha. When we are like refugees scampering towards the Buddha, we are determined and we believe in the Buddha because we have experienced the burdens of suffering. Therefore, suffering becomes a causal condition of faith. Essentially, suffering becomes a positive experience.

The purpose of the Buddha in explaining that faith comes from suffering is to keep us from feeling sadness, fear, and inadequate. If we apply the doctrine of dependent origination in everyday life, suffering will be the foundation of faith. Faith supports the Buddha Dhamma, helping us to cultivate for the cessation of influxes. Suffering, seen in this light, becomes beneficial.

## Conclusion

1. The mundane world, its cause and cessation, and method for the cessation of the mundane world result from the beginning or end of a process of dependent arising, which is produced when the Six Roots come in touch with the Six Surroundings. All these happen to man when he is still alive.
2. The states of dependent arising do not encompass three lifetimes or extend to the next life as is understood using everyday language. The interpretation of "paticca" does not allow such extension. "Paticca" means a chain of mutual dependency. The chain is so closely linked such that nothing can be inserted into it. It is a series of occurrences that cannot be divided into three life existences or lifetimes. Dependent arising is related to the Four Noble Truths, and there is no reason to break up its eleven states.
3. Dependent arising begins when Contact is experienced by a child who is old enough to understand certain things. The Contact is not one of Wisdom but of Ignorance, an absence of Right Mindfulness.
4. The doctrine of dependent origination reveals the truth about the beginning and end of suffering. It does not tell us that man owns suffering and has to retain it over many lifetimes. The owner of suffering is not present; no receiver is present when suffering occurs. The doctrine likewise tells the practical principle of causality. Only the Buddha's doctrine of dependent origination can reveal such Truth.

When I was still a student of Buddhism, I had no choice but to study a doctrine of dependent origination that was against the Buddha's original proclamation. Later, when I became a teacher of Buddhism, I went against the essence of the Buddha's doctrine by teaching that the process of dependent arising encompassed three lifetimes. I accept my mistake and ask for forgiveness. I have spent decades studying the doctrine of dependent origination to discover that it is within our grasp, that we can apply it in our everyday life through Right Mindfulness. When we are able to block dependent arising at the instant of a Contact, the Buddha's doctrine becomes beneficial and practical to us.

How do we apply the doctrine of dependent origination? When there is contact with surrounding, one has to maintain Right Mindfulness to keep Ignorance from developing into suffering.

I hope everyone will possess the right intelligence to correctly understand the doctrine of dependent origination. My interpretation of the doctrine of dependent origination might be criticized not only by Thai Buddhists but also by Buddhists all over the world because dependent arising is generally understood to extend over lifetimes. I was the target of severe criticisms in Thailand when I explained the concept of void and commented on the adhidhamma before. I am sure my interpretation of the doctrine of dependent origination will likewise be criticized. Nevertheless, because I am Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, I must perform my duty. I know what is right or wrong. I shall oppose to the end anything that I know is harmful to the Buddha Dhamma. I am not afraid of criticisms.

An applicable doctrine of dependent origination is what the Buddha realized and taught. If we embrace it, we can be able to end our suffering. A dependent arising, where the self or a main body is not present, is one that belongs to an ideal and practical doctrine.

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I am offering this book to enthusiasts of Buddhism so that they can correctly practice the Buddha Dhamma.

Notes: The translation is based on my interpretation of ideas in the [Chinese version](#) of the book. This is a continuing project, so the contents will be revised and edited from time to time. Information in brackets and word italicization are mine.

*Johnson Sumpio*

Source : [dependentorigination.atwebpages.com](http://dependentorigination.atwebpages.com)

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Comparative study:

[Maha-nidana Sutta](#) - Paticca-samuppada & Anatta  
[Paticca-samuppada-vibhanga Sutta](#) - Analysis of Dependent Co-arising

- [Paticcasamuppada](#) - by Ajahn Brahm
- [Paticcasamuppada](#) - some remarks by Ajahn Brahm
- [Paticcasamuppada](#) - by Pa Auk Sayadaw
- [Dependent Origination : The Buddhist Law of Conditionality](#) - Bhikkhu Prayudh Payutto